



# Clientele resume use of Extension system information after hiatus

## The Situation

Until 2001, there were four University of Idaho (UI) Extension Educators in Bingham County. One Educator was responsible for educational programs in the area of potato production, and one Educator was responsible for horticulture and other crops. The other two Educators conducted 4-H youth development, livestock, and family and consumer science programs.

There are approximately 54,000 acres potatoes in Bingham County grow, which is the largest acreage of any county in the U.S. There are approximately 73,000 acres alfalfa, 117,000 acres wheat, and 17,000 acres barley in Bingham County along with smaller acreages of other crops such as sugar beets, silage corn and oats. The county has a population of 44,000 of which 58 percent are rural residents and 42 percent urban. The urban population generates a lot of interest and questions in horticulture.

After the retirement of the horticulture/crops Extension Educator due to decreasing funding, the position was not filled leaving the residents of Bingham County without a UI Extension Educator to answer questions particularly concerning home horticulture. Although the remaining Extension Educators attempted to answer questions that came into the office, there was not time to take care of the needs of the population. Also, the Master Gardener program was discontinued. Due to these changes, a large number of urban people were no longer served by UI Extension.

## Our Response

In July 2006, with another decrease in funding and with demand for a horticulture educator increasing, the Extension Educator with potato responsibilities

was asked to work 50% of the time in horticulture, 35% in potatoes and 5% in crops. With this change, educational programs to meet the needs of the people were developed – the Master Gardener course was one program that was revived. Additionally, people in Bingham County again had a source of research-based information through the UI Bingham County Extension office to answer their questions about yard and garden concerns as well as questions about agricultural crops.

## Program Outcomes

Educational workshops and seminars have been given on topics such as tree care and landscaping. To reach more people interested in horticulture, in the spring of 2008 and 2009, min-workshops were held at a local retail garden center discussing yard and gardening issues such as lawn care, container gardening and vegetable production. Additionally, in 2009 Master Gardener volunteers were available at the same local retail garden center to answer questions from people who came there to shop. Conducting programs at a local retail garden center has increased the visibility of the horticulture program.

During the three years since reinstating a home horticulture Extension program, over 600 questions from residents in Bingham County have been answered. The Extension Educator has made approximately 950 face-to-face contacts via workshops, seminars and one-on-one contacts either in the office or at the client's place of residence.

Fifty people have completed the Master Gardener classes with many of them becoming Certified Master Gardeners. Master Gardeners have, for example, helped design and plant flower beds at the county public library and helped landscape a charter school.

They also assisted with planting tulips at the Blackfoot Sixth Grade School to recognize Red Ribbon week, a drug-awareness program. In 2009 alone, Certified Master Gardener volunteers donated 50 hours answering questions for over 70 people. They also volunteered nearly 370 hours working on community landscaping, beautification and other projects.

Brief educational articles dealing with a wide array of topics such as planting bulb flowers, lawn and tree care, transplanting melons and others have been written and published in several local newspapers during the growing season. During 2006 through 2009, 71 educational articles were published in local newspapers with a combined circulation of nearly 7,000.

A unique educational opportunity that occurred in 2009 was presenting information about trees to a group of mental developmentally challenged individuals at the Southeast Idaho Developmental Center in Blackfoot. This was an invited presentation and is a good example of the breadth of clientele who utilize UI Extension.

Clientele have expressed their appreciation for the programs and education they receive. For example, after presenting information on soils to a community garden class, the following written comment was received, "The classes provide another opportunity for us to share gardening in our community, and your participation is a key element."

People in the agricultural community are also appreciative as indicated by this written comment following a presentation about irrigation uniformity of crops, "We recognize the expertise you bring to your subject and are grateful that you would share your knowledge with others."

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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